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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 2231
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 0641
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0080
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0311
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 001981

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/21/2029
TAGS: PGOV IZ PHUM PREF PREL
SUBJECT: IDP RETURNS INITIATIVE IN ABU GHRAIB GATHERS
MOMENTUM WITH TRIBAL SUPPORT

REF: BAGHDAD 1558

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Classified By: USAID Deputy Mission Director Thomas Delaney for reason
1.4 (b).

¶1. (C) Summary: U.S. personnel arranged a visit by
representatives from the Ministry of Displacement and
Migration (MoDM) and Deputy Prime Minister Rafi Al-Essawi's
staff to Abu Ghraib July 12 to discuss potential for large
scale IDP returns to the area with local council members,
tribal leaders and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Abu Ghraib
participants said they welcome the initiative and that
security conditions are suitable for returns, although
attacks against returnees could occur as squatters are
evicted from returnee homes. Abu Ghraib participants
emphasized that the presence of some 4,000 IDPs from other
areas in Abu Ghraib presents the largest obstacle to returns
because those IDPs occupy homes and in many cases are
suspected of ties to the extremist groups who displaced
residents from Abu Ghraib to other areas. MoDM
representatives, Essawi staff, Abu Ghraib representatives and
Kadhamiya representatives will meet the week of July 19 to
discuss organizing the movement of IDPs between Abu Ghraib
and Kadhamiya. (A group of IDPs in Abu Ghraib are reportedly
Sunnis from Kadhamiya, while Shia from Abu Ghraib were
displaced to Kadhamiya). At a separate meeting July 15, Abu
Ghraib tribal leaders met with representatives from MoDM,
Essawi's office, Baghdad Provincial Council, Baghdad
Governorate and Iraqi Security Forces and agreed to guarantee
the security of returnees and not seek revenge against
returnees for tribal blood debt. Although U.S. personnel
arranged the initial meeting at the request of MoDM, Iraqi
stakeholders appear to be taking ownership of the initiative
and moving forward on their own. End summary.

Background

¶2.   (SBU) On June 4 the MoDM Department for Humanitarian
Affairs requested help from the Prime Minister-appointed
Implementation and Follow Up Committee for National
ReconciliationFQQ|QQIM1 although security incidents
continue to occur every few days. Several participants,
including those from the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police,
accused the media of sensationalizing attacks and creating
the impression that the area is more dangerous than it really
is. Abu Ghraib participants noted that hundred of families
have already returned to the area despite lingering security
problems and poor essential services. Participants said they
welcome returns to the area and agreed that the largest
obstacle to returns is the ongoing presence of IDPs from

other areas. Iraqi Police and Army representatives said
there is sufficient ISF presence in the area to maintain
security but emphasized the importance of close cooperation
with the community to carefully
manage the inflow of returnees in order to avoid
destabilizing the area.

Community Leaders Say IDPs from Other Areas Present Security
Threat

¶4.   (SBU) Abu Ghraib participants said the ongoing presence
of IDPs from other areas presents the largest obstacle to
returns because those IDPs occupy potential returnee homes
and because some of those IDPs are, or are perceived to be,
linked to the same kind of extremist elements that displaced
residents from Abu Ghraib. Abu Ghraib participants said that
most IDPs in the area came from Latifya (southern Baghdad
province), Mada'en (eastern Baghdad province) and Diyala
province and that their refusal to return in spite of
improved security conditions in those areas suggests they are
wanted by security forces or tribes for having committed
crimes or terrorist attacks before they fled. They said that
displaced Abu Ghraib residents would be reluctant to return
and live amid neighbors who they perceived as a potential
threat.

¶5.   (SBU) ISF representatives said that the ongoing
presence of IDPs in the area facilitates terrorist attacks
because it is relatively easy for perpetrators to hide among
a population not well known to the community. They added
that it is difficult for security forces to determine who is
a legitimate IDP, who fled to the area because they are a
fugitive elsewhere, and who is a terrorist hiding amid a
transient population. One tribal leader said that the lack
of tribal structure amid the IDP population in Abu Ghraib
makes it more difficult for security forces to police the
area. He explained that when security incidents occur in a
community with strong tribal structures, the tribe usually
knows who perpetrated the attack and can enforce disciplinary
measures within its rank and file. He added that under such
circumstances security forces could cooperate with tribal
leaders, who would police their kin, rather than policing the
entire populace. Another tribal leader said that without the
presence of such a large displaced population in the area it
would be difficult to perpetrate an attack within a tribe's
area of influence because the community could easily spot an
outsider. He said that since IDPs came from different areas
and different tribes, it is more difficult for security
forces or indigenous tribal leaders to police the community
in their traditional way.

Squatters Occupy Potential Returnee Homes

¶6.   (SBU) Abu Ghraib participants said that in addition to
real and perceived security threats posed by IDPs in the area
,the IDPs also present an obstacle to returns by squatting
in homes vacated by those who fled. Tribal participants said
that some returnees would be reluctant to evict squatters
lest they or their homes be targeted in revenge attacks. ISF
participants acknowledged that a number of attacks on
returnees and their homes occurred in late 2008 but said the
attacks were less inspired by the returns themselves than by
the way the former Iraqi Army commander in charge of the
area, General Nasser, used returns for propaganda and to
demographically engineer the area. Note: In the end of 2008
Qdemographically engineer the area. Note: In the end of 2008
General Nasser and his notoriously pro-Shia Muthanna Brigade
escorted dozens of Shia returnees back into the predominantly
Sunni area and abruptly evicted Sunni squatters, many of them
legitimate IDPs who were unable to return to their homes.
Some speculated that General Nasser was engineering returns
to build a "Shia wall" as a last line of defense along the
border of predominantly Shia Baghdad and predominantly Sunni
Anbar. Several dozen returnee houses were bombed amid the

highly publicized returns, eventually prompting U.S. and
Iraqi forces to impose a halt to all IDP returns to the area.
Most of the house bombings were apparently designed to avoid
injuries; many returnees received letters warning them to
vacate their homes before the explosions, while other house
bombings occurred after squatters were evicted but before
returnees moved back in. General Nasser was transferred to
another area and in January of 2009 U.S. and Iraqi forces
lifted the ban on returns and established a process of
screening and registering returnees to avoid another series
of destabilizing attacks. Returnees were required to present
their jinsiya (national identity card), shahadat jinsiya
(nationality certification), ration card, residency card and

either a deed or a rental agreement to prove their identify
and demonstrate prior residency in the area. Returnees were
required to have their documents inspected by a
representative of the nahia (neighborhood) council, qada
(district) council, the Iraqi Police and the Iraqi Army.
Nahia and qada council representatives would determine
whether the potential returnee was actually from the area and
Iraqi Police and Army representatives would determine whether
there were arrest warrants for anyone on the ration card.
Once all four entities approved the return, ISF inspected the
returnee home to make sure it was structurally sound and not
booby trapped. They also cleared out weapons caches and
evicted squatters. Returnees were notified once their homes
had been inspected and deemed suitable for return. Returnees
then received paperwork allowing them to pass through
checkpoints with their furniture. Without such paperwork,
ISF would not allow passage to or from the area with
furniture because of the widespread looting that accompanied
displacement and returns. End note.

¶7.   (SBU) Abu Ghraib representatives said that many Shia
IDPs displaced from Abu Ghraib are currently living in
makeshift shelters in the Chicook IDP cluster in Kadhamiya
(northwest Baghdad), while Sunnis displaced from Kadhamiya
are squatting in vacated homes in Abu Ghraib. Abu Ghraib
qada council chairman Kamel Abbas suggested the same group
meet with representatives from Kadhamiya's district council,
sheikh councils and neighborhood councils to discuss
organizing the voluntary return of IDPs between the two
areas. Note: On July 16, MoDM Director General Samir Nahi
told USAID/OFDA rep that Deputy Prime Minister Essawi's
office will host a meeting with representatives from Abu
Ghraib, Kadhamiya, MoDM and IFCNR next week. OFDA rep spoke
to Kadhamiya district council members last week about the
possibility organizing returns between the two areas and they
seemed interested in cooperating. End note.

Participants Discuss Next Steps

¶8.   (SBU) Deputy Prime Minister Essawi's representatives
asked Abu Ghraib participants about gaps in essential
services in Haswa and said they would enlist support by line
ministries to improve electricity, water, health care and
schools in order to attract returns. Abu Ghraib Qada Council
Chairman Kamel Abbas and Qa'em Maqam (the governor's
representative in the qada) Shakir agreed to provide a
detailed assessment of service needs by next week. MoDM
representatives invited qada council members to the MoDM
Karkh Returns Assistance Center July 19 to discuss organizing
a mass registration of those who have already returned to Abu
Ghraib. USAID/OFDA implementing partner International
Medical Corps (IMC), which staffs the MoDM Karkh Returns
Assistance Center and manages much of its operation, said it
will arrange a visit by the center's mobile team to Abu
Ghraib following the July 19 visit. Registering returnees
with MoDM entitles them to a one million dinar (about $800)
stipend and supporting documentation to facilitate the
transfer of ration cards, re-registration of children in
public schools, and return to government jobs.

MoDM Says Abu Ghraib Sheikhs Agreed to Guarantee Returnees'

Security, Forgive Tribal Blood Debt

¶9.   (C) MoDM Director General for Humanitarian Affairs
Q9.   (C) MoDM Director General for Humanitarian Affairs
Samir Nahi told OFDA rep July 16 that he attended a tribal
reconciliation conference in Abu Ghraib the previous day
along with representatives from Essawi's office, Prime
Minister Maliki's office, Baghdad Provincial Council, Baghdad
Governorate, the IFCNR-appointed Abu Ghraib Support Council,
the Abu Ghraib Tribal Council, and other Abu Ghraib community
leaders. Nahi said the tribal leaders signed an agreement to
guarantee the security of returnees in their areas and to
refrain from taking revenge on returnees with whom their
tribes have blood debt. Nahi said the tribesmen agreed to
provide a copy of the agreement to the Prime Minister's
office.   Note: An agreement by Abu Ghraib's tribes to
refrain from taking revenge on returnees with whom they have
blood debt represents a milestone that could create the
confidence necessary for returns to Abu Ghraib to gather
momentum. Tribes are probably better situated to guarantee
returnees' security that Iraqi Security Forces in some areas
of Abu Ghraib, both because they have more influence over
their rank and file and because they pose the primary threat
to some potential returnees. End note.

¶10.   (C) Nahi said that he told the group he would task the

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Karkh Returns Assistance Center with coordinating with Abu
Ghraib's community leaders to register returnees who have
already returned to the area. He said the ministry will
allow even those who had not registered as IDPs to register
there as returnees and that the ministry would work to
expedite registration through repeat mobile team visits.
Note: Nahi's pledge is welcome and USAID/OFDA will follow up
with the Karkh Returns Center and IMC mobile team staff to
ensure follow through. Mobile registration drives in other
areas have experienced mixed success, depending on how well
community leaders spread the word about what documentation is
required and where and when the registrations will take
place. End note.

Comment

¶11.   (C) MoDM representatives and Essawi's staff appear to
have secured the necessary support from local government,
community leaders, ISF and tribesmen to gain traction with an
organized return to Abu Ghraib. Essawi's office appears
prepared to enlist line ministries to support the effort, but
the pressure will be on for quick, tangible improvements.
Abu Ghraib representatives said repeatedly that they wanted
action rather than empty promises. Significant work remains
to be done before returns commence. MoDM has still not begun
an intentions survey to determine where there is interest in
returns to Abu Ghraib or returns of IDPs in Abu Ghraib to
their original locations. Returnees from extremely poor
areas like Chicook IDP cluster will likely need more material
support than the Government of Iraqi is equipped to quickly
provide, including shelter rehabilitation, rent subsidies,
income generating projects, and legal services. USAID/OFDA,
REF, ePRT and the U.S. military will continue to follow the
initiative closely and are prepared to provide support.
End comment.

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